

monstrously unjust; they were human beings who had watched their dearest friend nailed up and now looked as though He were gone forever. Tears have a way of coming at times like that, tears without apology.

Just suppose right now you had buried the one nearest to your heart and had walked away from that fresh mound of earth and garlands of flowers. Then on Sunday morning you returned real early to place fresh flowers and, lo, the grave was opened! Before you could figure out what had happened, there near the grave stood your loved one.

What would be your reaction? Awe? Fear? No, not half so much as inexpressible joy! You could never be the same again. Nor were those disciples of Jesus who actually experienced much of the same thing; nor were they ever the same again. From that garden they went with such consuming joy that their witness broke out like a wondrous infection. Their sorrow gave way to ecstatic joy when the grave could not hold Him.

DEATH RAISED TO LIFE

Not only did despair and sorrow rise to hope and joy, death gave way to eternal life. Several years ago I planted a dogwood tree in our backyard. Two years ago the tree died (at least, we thought it had died). The leaves withered, the bark

split and dried. The trunk of the tree was cut down nearly to the ground. This morning as I walked in the garden early, there I saw a three foot branch growing out of the old stump. Dead? Hardly. Out of what I had called death came new life, the same kind of life as the former. And it, too, shall some day bloom as the parent plant bloomed.

The soul of man, much like that dogwood tree, knows no powers of extinction. It can be changed in form, but it cannot be extinguished. One must admit that this is one of religion's hardest points to believe in. The universal monotony of death, which claims saint and sinner, young and old, rich and poor, is a fixed rendezvous of all mankind. It is vastly democratic and absurdly impersonal. To conclude that its universalism is also the final apostrophe is to conclude an absurdity.

The work of Jesus Christ on earth was largely a work to redeem men from sin and death; but to make of Him a reformer, a good teacher, a miracle worker, and to stop it at that (without conquering that imposter of death) is to misunderstand and to underrate miserably His primary mission on earth.

He took death by the throat and choaked the permanent grip out of it. Little wonder that he said, "He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

OUR FATHER

April 13, 1958

Scripture: Luke 11:1-4

That memorable prayer Jesus taught His disciples to pray began, "Our Father . . ." The appropriate starting place for every petition is with God. Friends, in this second sermon on Fundamentals of our Faith, we are privileged to take a close look at that wondrous relationship called prayer.

To millions it is an unknown art; many never learned its value or, having known it, have lapsed into mild cynicism and stopped praying. To multi-millions of

modern disciples, prayer comes with difficulty not so much because they do not believe in praying but because they have placed such little value on the process.

TOO BUSY TO PRAY

Among those of us who deal with religious wares, the art of effective praying is sometimes a matter of gross neglect. Even in the business of formal worship, prayer can be pushed to one side as one of the many preliminaries to something of

greater importance. The talk with God is abbreviated out of deference to the talk with ourselves. But how about the day-by-day, hour-by-hour routine of living? What role does prayer play in earning our daily bread, in sending the children off to school, paying debts, signing contracts, plowing the soil? Does prayer have a place in these routine matters? Or are we so busy with the plowing, cooking, paying, teaching that there is little or no time for prayer?

In our most honest moments we must admit that under the guise of too many things to do, the quiet moments with God have thinned out. Yet to admit such is also to admit that one believes in a headlong, rushing before God as an effective way of living out these days. In muted testimony it declares that God must hold the world together by man's feverish, frantic pace, that the Kingdom of God will come by this nervous anxiety. Not so! As a matter of fact, the Kingdom is delayed by such faithless haste, such pagan distraction.

WAIT ON THE LORD

Once we sang an old hymn, one line of which said, "Rush not before Him whatever betide . . ." This sound advice knows that man cannot see around the bend of life's river, nor need he, if he knows that God who does see around the bend will be there when man makes the turn. What private can run ahead of the commanding general in a field of battle? Nor should the privates in this salvation army be known for their jumping the guns on God.

In a tiny chapel in Switzerland there hangs a beautiful picture of a plowman in the open field. There, behind the plowstock, he has dropped the reins and has knelt on the freshly opened, mellow earth. He is praying with folded hands and bowed head. The artist added an interpretative touch: an angel has descended, has picked up the reins, has taken hold of the plowstock and is following behind the horses in continuation of the furrows the farmer had begun. The captain under the picture reads, "No Time Lost." Of course, there is no time lost when we take time out to pray.

Most folk take time out for a coffee break. Is the stomach more important than the mind and soul? Yes, if we are too busy to pray, we are too busy to live superlatively.

PERSISTENT PRAYER

Many are asking, "Is it worthwhile to pray persistently, to stay on your knees for certain things to happen?" In a word, "Can a person get God to change His mind by praying incessantly?" This is a timely question indeed especially in the light of much Biblical truth.

There are passages that seem to teach that prayers offered in concerted sincerity will be answered. Look at a few of them: "And yet shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."

Now and then one hears of an all-night prayer meeting where hundreds pray for one person's conversion, or another's sickness, or God's outpouring on a great evangelistic meeting. The question is, "Does God change His mind because of our much praying?" We must be honest in the answer: no, God does not change His mind. To conclude that He does, makes Him subject to human opinion, makes it sound as though His doings on earth are afterthoughts, the result of human filibustering.

HIS PERFECT WILL

His Will is unchangeable because it is God's Will, perfect from the beginning, unchangeable for all ages. Then, what is the value of such persistent praying if it doesn't change God's mind on things? Just this: while it doesn't change God's mind, such praying often changes our

mind. And believe me, many of our minds need changing for God's sake.

In the spiritual climate of concerted praying (when there is a oneness of spirit, a togetherness of purpose), a person is apt to lose himself in this life-changing power. If he rises from his knees with a renewed vision, a sense of sympathy for a downtrodden brother, a contagious enthusiasm to go out in the world not as a self-seeker but as a self-loser, then his prayers have been answered. He has done the changing, not God.

When life is lived out in that tenor, then another passage from the Bible makes even more sense: "And it shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer: and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." That means that a Godly life is in constant tune with his Maker. The wave length is open; the receiver and transmitter are already warmed up. Nothing is needed for communication but the voice raised either with or without words.

Every adult Christian will remember that Jesus prayed persistently that the cup would be removed from Him, that He would forego Calvary and its excruciating pain; but He quickly reflected His willingness by praying, "Nonetheless, not my will but thine be done." When this little, yet dynamic phrase is added, it automatically conditions everything else for which one has prayed: "Nonetheless, not my will but thine be done."

DELAYS NOT DENIALS

Hear this fundamental of prayer: delays may not mean denials. Once again the element of time comes in to curse us. Many look for the answer to their prayers immediately after opening their eyes. God is credited with answering their prayers only if something like an answer is forthcoming. But how about the many prayers that are offered from contrite hearts when days, weeks, months, and sometimes years pass without any apparent answer?

The most consoling answer is that what

seems like delays may not be denials at all. Many factors may determine the "how" and "when" of God's reply. For instance, you may have prayed for something which you are not spiritually mature enough to receive. A young child in infancy cannot eat rare steak; his is largely a diet of milk and softly ground food. But after years of growth and the appearance of good teeth, the diet changes. Much the same for a Christian in his spiritual growth. Those who remain in the cradle of infantile ideas; who cling to childish notions about God, prayer, faith, and the future; who have no reason for the hope that is within them; who desire Godly things but interest themselves in the things of the world, they cannot eat the strong meat of the Gospel.

Theirs must be a diet of pabulum: constant encouragement, incessant attention, and continuous rebuke. Now, God cannot match mature gifts with immature personalities. His sense of values prevents such poor economy. That is one reason He must delay the answer; however, it is not a denial.

NURTURE DEPENDENCE

Such delay may accomplish one of God's major purposes to nurture dependence on Him. If prayers were answered with the speed of an electronic brain, who would take time out to meditate upon God's omnipotence and man's finiteness? Few, indeed! Yet, when one must search his soul for the answer of God's delay, such a process activates dependence upon God; hence, the re-arranged conditions in which God can answer prayers with greatest facility.

So, let us go back to our knees, re-establish this neglected soul-developer. To ignore God is the most brutal type of hatred; never to speak to Him is the worst type of ignoring. We often say our prayers, but do we ever pray and do the thoughts within our hearts go with the words we say? Words without the heart the Lord will never hear, nor will He to those lips attend whose hearts are not sincere.